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January 29, 2008

The Honorable Gerald A. Reynolds  
Chairman  
United States Commission on Civil Rights  
624 Ninth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20425

Dear Chairman Reynolds:

I write to request information on a matter of great concern to our Nation and to the people of Vermont. It has come to my attention that the Vermont Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights ("Commission") has been without a charter since December 2006, because the Commissioners have failed to vote on the Vermont Advisory Committee's membership list. I am concerned that this may not be an isolated incident. According to a May 2006 Government Accountability Office report, "38 out of 51 of the state advisory committees to the Commission cannot conduct any work because they do not have approved charters" giving them authority to operate.

These trends are troubling given that state advisory committees have long played a key role in fulfilling the Commission's fact-finding and reporting mission. It is my understanding that without these charters, the state advisory committees are unable to conduct their critical work and the capacity of the Commission to investigate and report on civil rights is greatly undermined.

I therefore request that you provide me (1) an update on the Commission's efforts to ensure that the Vermont Advisory Committee's charter is secured; (2) the list of state advisory committees currently not chartered; (3) a detailed explanation of why each state advisory committee currently not chartered had their proposed-member lists rejected and who made the decision to reject those lists; and (4) a detailed explanation of why each state advisory committee currently not chartered has not had an up or down vote on their proposed-member lists.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter. Please respond to my office by no later than Wednesday, February 13, 2008.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Abigail Thernstrom  
The Honorable Gail Heriot  
The Honorable Peter N. Kirsanow  
The Honorable Arlan D. Melendez  
The Honorable Ashley L. Taylor Jr.  
The Honorable Michael Yaki

